



SPIRITUAL FRONTIERS FELLOWSHIP

Newsletter

Vol. 5

LIBRARY
ASSOCIATION FOR RESEARCH & ENLIGHTENMENT
VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA

No. 9

November 1971

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Do you know ... SFF has the world's largest lending-by-mail library in the spiritual-psychical field? Over 5,000 books are available to members as a free service.

Can you guess how many books are loaned out each month? Librarian Linda Hoffmann reports 1,383 books were loaned to 963 members during September. Consistently, the monthly average runs well over 1,000!

SFF regards the lending library and the Progressive Reading List as important member services and wishes to maintain them as a service free to members in spite of rising costs. New members find them especially valuable as an introduction to the spiritual-psychical field, and it serves to promote SFF's basic purposes.

Deficits incurred by this library service are partially offset by profits from new book sales -- and from special gifts. You can help by patronizing our bookstore. Another way is through increasing your membership dues to a higher category, or by a special gift.

Your love, help and generosity are needed and greatly appreciated.

Yours in Fellowship

Robert D. Ericsson

SECOND REGIONAL SEMINAR

Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma and New Mexico members will meet in Austin, Texas Thursday evening to Saturday afternoon, Dec. 9-11, 1971, at the Downtowner Motor Inn. Registrants will be welcomed by SFF Executive Committee members. A broad range of workshops promises an outstanding program.

On Thursday, 7:30 p.m., the Rev. C. Leslie Palmer of San Diego, California and SFF's Western Regional Chairman, will discuss "The Jury Is Always Out." Bill Boykin, Area Chairman, will lead the reception and begin the informal prayer, healing, meditation and psychic awareness groups. Friday workshops include How Prayer-Healing Groups Heal, Meditation, Psychic Development Classes, Counseling Psychic Problems, General Parapsychology and Psychic Research, Dream Interpretation, Reincarnation and the Bible and many more! The Healing Service will be held Friday evening followed by informal small group experiences. Workshops will end Saturday at 3:30 p.m.

For registration \$35.00, information and volunteers for starting local study groups write Louise A. Geil, 3914 Rockledge, Austin, Texas 78731. Make room reservations directly with the Downtowner Inn.

● On February 24-26, 1972 a Regional Seminar in New Jersey for members in New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia and Washington, D.C. will be held. For information and volunteers write Mr. John Deehan, 107 N. Clinton Ave., Wenonah, New Jersey 08090.

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NEWS NOTES

● Rev. J. Gordon Melton, SFF Field Representative will help form study groups and new areas. Write for available dates: Nov. 10-11 North New Jersey Nov. 17 Connecticut, Nov. 19-21 Schenectady, Nov. 22 Syracuse.

● Washington, D.C. Nov. 7 Rev. J. Gordon Melton "How Real Is Spiritual Healing" Church of Holy City, 1611-16th Street NW, 2 p.m.; Nov. 4-6 Study Group Development, call M. Nachtwey, (301) 469-8371. Nov. 28 Tentative - Dr. Marcus Bach.

● Philadelphia Nov. 14 Dr. Allen Spraggett "Spiritual Dimensions and Growth in Psychism" Arch Street Methodist Church 2:30 p.m.; Dec. 5 Sister Justa Smith.

● Central Pa. For Study Group information write Mrs. Veda Meade, telephone 652-1984 home, 564-3812 office.

● Detroit Nov. 11 Rev. Alex Holmes. For information call LI 5-3166.

● Chicago Nov. 19 Dorothy Moore "Spiritual Aspects of Mediumship" Faith Methodist Church, 169 N. Cuyler, Oak Park, 8:00 p.m.

● Chicago North Shore Dec. 2 Ann Jensen "The Psychical and the Spiritual." For information write Leonard Szerlong, 512 Lake St., Evanston, Ill.

● Minneapolis Nov. 14 Norman Elliott "Encounter Groups-How They Work in the Spiritual Life." Write Connie Baldwin, 5045 Second Avenue South, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55419.

The Newsletter of Spiritual Frontiers Fellowship is published ten times a year (monthly except July and August), by the Spiritual Frontiers Fellowship, the office is located at 800 Custer, Evanston, Illinois 60202. Members of SFF receive the Newsletter by virtue of membership. Second-class postage paid at Evanston, Illinois.

GIFTS FOR CHRISTMAS

Excellent books and cassettes-- Request our New Sales List. Worthwhile: The Life Beyond Death by Arthur Ford \$6.95; Communication With the Spirit World by a Catholic priest \$5.35 any many more.

THANK YOU

A lady wrote, I remembered you in my will! Five others became Supporting Members (\$50.00) Wonderful.

● Evansville, Ind. Rev. Henry Hein, Peoria, Ill., "The Psychic, the Subconscious and the Bible" spoke recently. For information write Dr. H. Erickson, 2105 E. Walnut St., Evansville, Indiana 47714.

● Peoria, Ill. For information write Henry Hein, 1104 East Frye Street, Peoria, Illinois 61603.

● Des Moines Dec. 1 and 3 Dorothy Moore "Psychic Development and Healing Seminar." Unity Center, 414 31st Street, 7:30 p.m.

● Memphis For Study Group information call Betty Pankey 685-7542; A new Prayer-Therapy Study Group will be led by Mrs. Helen Marshall.

● San Diego Dec. 8-11 Dorothy Moore Seminar, "Psychic Intuitiveness and Healing." Write 4235 Loma Riviera Lane, San Diego, tel.: 224-5180.

● Chicago May 18-20 Annual Conference, Bismarck Hotel; May 17 National Seminar for Group Leaders.

● Northfield, Minn. June 25-July 1 SFF Retreat at Carleton College.

● Gettysburg, Pa. July 23-29 SFF Retreat at Gettysburg College.

● Atlanta, Georgia August 24-27, SFF Retreat, Emory University at Oxford.

The Mystics -- Psychic Heroes of the Middle Ages

After gaining insight into the essence of the mystical experience and some knowledge of the mystical pathway, one is often not prepared for the variety of material, images, and ideas which appear in an average sample of mystical writings. Far from being the monotonous repetition which many think, the writings of the mystics are alive and colorful. Evelyn Underhill offers her explanation.

"The history of mysticism in the church is the history of the reaction of many different temperaments to the one Reality and one demand. Thus it is a varied history, as anything so closely concerned with human character is bound to be. It does not put before us one particular kind of experience or one uniform type of perfection."

Mystical self-understanding varies with the type of person who writes of his experience and with the theological milieu in which he is bound. Thus we do not expect a twelfth century mystic to use the imagery of a de Chardin. An understanding of the whys of their differences gives one a most meaningful tool toward appreciating and judging the various mystics. They must be seen as men and women of their time, heirs of a particular culture with particular thought forms, immersed in a historical stream which gives boundaries to their possibilities of expression. Thus in reading them, we must do some historical juggling with their material to break through the barriers of time and culture. The great classics of mystic literature are those which present us with the least necessity of juggling.

The polarities of Mysticism

Between the individual idiosyncrasies of the mystics and the one pathway to the one Reality that they all follow are some basic decisions which the mystics must make which place them upon a continuum between two polarities.

The basic polarity in western mysticism is between the theocentric and Christocentric. In the theocentric mystic, experience is directed primarily toward God, the Eternal and Infinite One. Meister Eckhart and St. Augustine are typical of the theocentric mystic who describes God basically in impersonal symbols, especially Light and Love. Such mystics keep ever before us the infinity of the transcendent which is always more than we are.

The Christocentric mystics center their experience on the direct personal communion with God in the incarnate Jesus. In mystics of this type, represented most beautifully in St. Teresa of Avila and St. Francis of Assisi, God is apprehended in His intimate presence as personality, accepting His creature into Himself through the identification of the soul with Christ, crucified, risen and exalted. The greatest theocentric mystics appear especially at the beginning of the mystic explosion in the fifth century, and it is with them that a dialogue between east

and west can begin. It is with the Christocentric mystics that one finds the most creative bearers of the tradition through the centuries, and in their writings is where the dialogue between the church-which-has-forgotten its psychic heritage and the church-which-remembers its heritage can emerge.

The second polarity of Western mystics is that between the contemplative and active life. Mysticism in the western church has a contemplative image. When one speaks of mysticism, images of an elderly monk in an austere cell in the middle of the forest crowd the head and offend the social imperatives. While there have been, and continue to be, contemplatives in western mysticism, and while all mystics go through withdrawn stages of spiritual growth, the activist is the real bearer of the western mystical tradition. St. Teresa was an administrator of a number of Carmelite houses. St. Francis drove his brothers to wander all over Europe doing the works of God. George Fox was a social reformer. Rufus Jones was a teacher, pacifist and writer. Here is the church's answer to the hilltop sage. What good is it to gain the world (of heights in mystical experience) and to lose the soul (life in communion with one fellowmen.)

Some Mystic Heroes

Western mysticism truly begins with Dionysius the Areopagite in the fifth century but reaches its high point in the middle ages. The six hundred years from 1100 to 1700 might be characterized as the time of its greatest influence, beginning with Hildegarde and Bernard and running through George Fox, Madame Guyon, and Fenelon. Between these two dates, from among the many great mystics, three stand out slightly above the others -- St. Francis of Assisi (whose books were burned), St. John of the Cross (who is a doctor of the church), and St. Teresa of Avila (recently declared a doctor of the church).

(Footnote. The author admits to some personal prejudice in his choice of these three. Possibly it is because he is a Protestant who sees these three as reformers before the Reformation, or possibly because he is a Wesleyan trying to recover a pre-Lutheran heritage.)

St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) arose in the cusp of the thirteenth century as the son of a wealthy nobleman. His psychic awakening came in 1202 as Francis was about to become a knight. It began with his giving his new armor to an ill-clad knight. In a dream after this hasty act he was given a vision of a whole room of magnificent armor and a beautiful bride, both to be his. As Francis quickly hurried off to join the papal army, he was halted for the first time by his 'voice', which told him to return to Assisi and wait for an interpretation of his vision. The answer came in time as Francis realized that the armor was his Franciscans and the bride, Lady Poverty. The voice also told Francis to 'rebuild* the church' -- the message that got his movement started.

The essence of Francis' psychic life can be seen by looking at his last two years. Bringing his brothers to LaVerna, Francis isolated himself; but fortunately for later generations, Brother Leo spied on Francis

and left an account of seeing Francis often in ecstasy and on occasion teleported in the air. At the Feast of the Assumption, Francis began a fast which was to last until the Feast of St. Michael and to become the time of his final purification and mystic union. Brother Leo intruded only once during this time, but the awakened brother saw a ball of fire descend on Francis. Francis told Leo that the 'Lord had appeared and said something wonderful would happen soon!" That something great happened on September 14, 1224, on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross when Francis received the stigmata, the visible wounds of Christ on his body. In a vision he saw Jesus on the Cross and angels. The stigmata never left. Francis, after his fast, began a trip to Portincula, preparing to die. Many cures accompanied his journey as he stopped in each village. It also became a time of awakening for many of the brothers, one going so far as to pre-cognize Francis' death. What this great psychic left for later ages can begin to be grasped from this selection of his:

Praised be my Lord God with all His creatures; and specially our brother the sun, who brings us the day, and who brings us the light; fair is he, and shining with a very great splendour: O Lord, to us he signifies Thee!

Praised be my Lord for our sister the moon, and for the stars, the which He has set clear and lovely in heaven.

Praised be my Lord for our brother the wind, and for air and cloud, calms and all weather, by the which Thou upholdest in life all creatures.

Praised be my Lord for our sister water, who is very serviceable unto us, and humble, and precious, and clean.

Praised be my Lord for our brother fire, through whom Thou givest us light in the darkness; and he is bright, and pleasant, and very mighty, and strong.

Praised be my Lord for our mother the earth, the which doth sustain us and keep us, and bringeth forth divers fruits, and flowers of many colours, and grass.

Praised be my Lord for all those who pardon one another for His love's sake and who endure weakness and tribulation; blessed are they who peaceably shall endure, for Thou, O most Highest, shalt give them a crown!

St. Teresa of Avila (1515-82) and St. John of the Cross were contemporaries in the Carmelite order of Spain. Both were contemporaries of Luther, Henry VIII, and Calvin; and represent the form of reformation that did not break with Catholicism. Teresa was an aristocrat but moved from her socialite activities to a Carmelite convent. The cooling of her initial religious ardour led to a twenty year inner war and only in her forty-first year did the war end and her full mystical life began. In her Autobiography is fully described the few years of contemplative life that followed -- complete with visions, trances, and states of ecstasy. In 1560 the active side of Teresa asserted itself again, and she began her career of reform by working first on the Carmelite order, which had grown lax and decadent. Her greatness now emerged, continuous with her life of travel, reform, and administration; her mystical life reached new heights of grandeur. More importantly for later generations, Teresa

was an able writer and in vivid word pictures and rich metaphors left an accurate description of her inner life. More than one lesson could be drawn from the material in her books, particularly The Interior Castle. Instead of trying to summarize her teachings, however, we shall be content with a short passage to catch her literary genius and spiritual depth. Possibly this short excerpt on ecstasy will lead to further reading in Teresa's writings:

While seeking God in this way, the soul becomes conscious that it is fainting almost completely away, in a kind of swoon, with an exceeding great and sweet delight. It gradually ceases to breathe and all its bodily strength begins to fail it; it cannot even move its hands without great pain; its eyes involuntarily close, or, if they remain open, they can hardly see. If a person in this state attempts to read, he is unable to spell out a single letter: it is as much as he can do to recognize one. He sees that letters are there, but, as the understanding gives him no help, he cannot read them even if he so wishes. He can hear, but he cannot understand what he hears. He can apprehend nothing with the senses, which only hinder his soul's joy and thus harm rather than help him. It is futile for him to attempt to speak: his mind cannot manage to form a single word, nor, if it could, would he have the strength to pronounce it. For in this condition all outward strength vanishes, while the strength of the soul increases so that it may the better have fruition of its bliss. The outward joy experiences is great and most clearly recognized.

St. John of the Cross (1542-1591) also a former Spanish aristocrat turned Carmelite, was so disgusted with the lax state of the Order that he was about to leave it when he met Teresa in 1563. Teresa then fifty-two, gave a vision to the twenty-one year old John of a reformed church. John moved to Avila and remained in close and constant contact with Teresa the rest of her life and acted on her confessor as spiritual director of Teresa's Convent of the Incarnation. In 1577 as the conflict between the older, unreformed Carmelites and Teresa came to a head, John was kidnapped and kept in prison for eight months in solitary confinement. Here John's mystic life emerged; he experienced the mystic union and began to compose his poetic-mystical study of the song of Solomon, A Spiritual Canticle.

John's work is a perfect compliment of Teresa's. A trained theologian in Thomistic theology, John speaks with all the insight of his training. While Teresa sends us into heights of rapture in her descriptions of the things awaiting travelers on the mystic pathway. John is the master writer of the realities of life on the mystic pathway, always remembered in the title of his major work, The Dark Night of the Soul. The mystic life is not movement from one mountain top to another. In-between are the valleys of spiritual struggle, psychic encounters with lower entities and inner purification. A taste of John's ability to describe his experiences is seen in the following on the walk in dark faith:

Now if the soul observes itself at the time of this darkness, it will soon notice how safe it is from vainglory, pride, and presumption, from vain and false joy and many other things. And so we see clearly that, by walking in dark faith, the soul by no means runs the risk of being lost, but, on the contrary, is gaining much, since in this state it is perfecting itself in all the virtues.

Therefore, oh spiritual soul, when you find your desire obscured, your affections in aridity and constraint, and your faculties deprived of their capacities for any internal exercise: be not saddened by this, but rather consider it a blessed lot, since God is now about to liberate you from yourself and to take the labor from your hands.

To mention these three -- Francis, Teresa and John -- is not to belittle others. Julianna of Norwich, Jan van Ruysbroeck, Catherine of Genoa, or Walter Hilton are among many that could be mentioned as well. In any case, they all lead to the same place. Catherine of Siena described the life she knew as a result of her forays into regions beyond, where she beheld 'The hidden things of God,' and experienced the oneness of the soul (Catherine) with the Me (God in Christ):

The soul is a tree existing by love, and can live by nothing else but love. If this soul have not in truth the divine love of perfect Charity she cannot produce the fruit of life, but only of death. Needs be then that the root of this tree, that is the affection of the soul, should grow in and issue from the circle of true self-knowledge which is contained in Me, who have neither beginning nor end, like the circumference of a circle. For turn as thou wilt within a circle, inasmuch as the circumference has no end nor beginning, thou always remainest within it. And this knowledge of the self and of Me is found in the earth of true humility, which is as wide as the diameter of the circle, that is, the knowledge of self and of Me.

Continuing the Dialogue -- The Psychic Hero

There is always some hesitancy to present a lesson like this one which emphasizes the role that certain outstanding individuals have had in continuing the vitality of a stream of thought and activity. The danger in such a presentation is that the greatness and genius of these heroes will tend to discourage us in our own development, instead of inspiring us to higher levels. Heroes are so awe-inspiring that we can look at them like a unique and valuable jewel never to be duplicated, touched or approached. If encountering the greats of the psychic stream affects us this way, the encounter has been fruitless, or at best an exercise in history.

Great psychics are not to be worshipped. They are to be listened to for their wealth of knowledge and experience and then left behind as we grow ourselves in knowledge and experience. It is great to sit at the foot of a master. It is greater still to rise up and walk on the path

to becoming a master. When we remember St. Francis or Teresa or John, there will always be that moment of awe, but quickly let the awe receive the command, 'Go thou and do likewise.' "But I can never become a John or a Francis or a Teresa." Possibly not in this life, only a very, very few will. However, SFF's vision is not cut off with the end of this earthly existence. There is room for us to grow and develop in ages and realms to come. The perspective is from and toward eternity.

Bibliography:

To those books mentioned last month are to be added:

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New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941.

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E. P. Dutton, 1916.

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